



AOT in Action

Welcome to AOT in Action, your weekly e-newsletter from the Arizona Office of Tourism (AOT).

A Message from Director Margie A. Emmermann:

Good morning,

As a Tribal leader once said, *“Don't forget the teachings of the ancestors. In their paths we will find hope for the future.”*

From deciphering petroglyphs of early Native American cultures to uncovering hidden treasures left behind by civilizations long gone, Arizona archaeologists continually discover ancient materials still hidden within our canyon walls and underneath the desert floor. As a result of their findings, we can educate others about Arizona's vibrant culture and heritage.

March is [Arizona Archaeology & Heritage Awareness Month](#) and presents a great opportunity to learn about Arizona's amazing history. Throughout the month, several museums, historical societies, tribes, agencies, parks, and archaeology organizations will be hosting a variety of events across the state in celebration of archaeology. For a complete list of activities, visit www.azstateparks.com.

Speaking of celebrations, the [Grand Canyon National Park](#) is commemorating its 90th anniversary as a national park. This majestic tourism asset was established as a national park by Congress in 1919. Each year, more than four million people visit the canyon, and contribute millions of dollars to Arizona's economic vitality.

Have a great week!

AOT News

New Updates to AOT's Research Web site!

The following items have been updated in the Research and Statistics section of AOT's business-to-business Web site www.azot.gov.

- [Airport Passenger Volume December 2008](#)

For additional information or questions, please contact Beth Billings, Research Specialist, at 602-364-3689 or via e-mail at bbillings@azot.gov.

Heat up Arizonaguide.com and Post Your Summer Specials Online

The days are getting longer and the temperatures are getting hotter, which can mean only one thing – summer is almost here! Don't miss the chance to post your summer deals on AOT's consumer Web site, www.ArizonaGuide.com under the "Travel Deals" section. Here, visitors will have the opportunity to view a listing of special deals and packages by clicking on "Summer Specials."

If you are a supplier, you may directly post tourism related specials, discounts or packages by visiting www.azot.gov and clicking on Travel Deals. There is no charge to list a package on the Travel Deals section. If you have questions or need additional assistance, contact Marjorie Magnusson at 602-364-3695 or via e-mail at mmagnusson@azot.gov.

AOT Events

AOT Carried Out Media Mission to Germany and Switzerland

AOT's German representative, Anja Bredemeier, carried out a European media mission to both Germany and Switzerland. She targeted media in three major cities, Hamburg and Munich Germany and Zurich Switzerland.

During the week-long mission, Anja met with 15 key media representatives for one-on-one desk-side appointments. The appointments ranged from freelance travel writers and golf magazines to major newspapers and lifestyle magazines.

For additional information, please contact Hylton Fothergill at 602-3640-3706 or via e-mail at hfothergill@azot.gov.

United Kingdom & Ireland Media Mission Opportunity, May 11 – 15, 2009

AOT will take part in a media mission to the UK and Ireland in May 2009 and is inviting Arizona DMOs to participate.

The week long mission will begin in London and continue to Glasgow, Scotland and Dublin, Ireland before returning to London. The format of the mission will be one-to-one desk-side meetings in each city. It is anticipated that nearly 30 key journalists will be met during the five-day trip. The cost to participate is \$1,200 per delegate (DMOs only).

For additional information, please contact Hylton Fothergill at 602-3640-3706 or via e-mail at hfothergill@azot.gov.

Upcoming Events

Event – Internationale Tourismus Boerse

Date – March 11 – 15

Location – Berlin, Germany

Event – French Media and Trade Sales Mission

Date – March 16 – 18

Location – Paris, France

Event – Southern Hospitality AAA/CAA FAM Tour

Date – March 19-22

Location – Phoenix, Scottsdale, and Tucson

Industry News

Arizona State Parks Board Temporarily Closes Two State Parks to Stabilize Historic Buildings

The Arizona State Parks Board voted Friday to temporarily close two State Parks for repairs and to move park rangers to other State Parks that have lost many professional and seasonal personnel due to a \$34.6 M sweep from State Parks funds.

Tonto Natural Bridge has severe roof leaks and structural problems and Jerome State Historic Park has a wall is collapsing. Both of those parks will close on Thursday, February 26 at 5:00 p.m.

According to Assistant Parks Director, Jay Ream, "Tonto Natural Bridge and McFarland State Historic Park have been slated for years for these repairs and both projects are 'hammer ready' jobs that small construction firms will be able to bid on soon. The Tonto Natural Bridge stabilization project may go to bid about March 6. That repair process may take five to six months to complete and after completion the Board will re-evaluate the budget situation for re-opening. The Jerome State Historic Park stabilization may take two months to prepare for the bidding process and then that project will probably take at least six months to complete as well." (building photos available)

McFarland State Historic Park was recently closed because the adobe walls are crumbling and the foundation of the building is washing away underneath the walls. Hand-made adobe bricks will have to be made to replace the older foundation. That project is out for bid now and bids are due March 19, 2009.

The seven-member volunteer Parks Board also decided to further explore alternatives for reaching the \$5.5 M shortfall that might include furloughs, layoffs, some park closures and canceling and/or suspending Heritage grants. Heritage fund grant monies will be transferred to the Enhancement Fund (gate fees) so the agency will have operating funds through the end of FY2009.

The Board left open the option to reconvene before the official April Board meeting for additional action as deemed appropriate to keep the agency functioning.

For more information about Arizona State Parks call (602) 542-4174 (outside of the Phoenix metro area call toll-free 800-285-3703) or visit www.azstateparks.com.

SAVE the DATE: 5th Annual Arizona Tourism Unity Dinner, April 15, 2009

Join leaders from the business, government and tourism community at the Arizona Biltmore Resort & Spa on Wednesday, April 15 for the 5th Annual Arizona Tourism Unity Dinner. This is a great opportunity to celebrate tourism and honor the contributions of extraordinary Arizonans for their leadership and support of the tourism industry. The program will begin with a silent auction at 5:30 p.m. and dinner at 7:00 p.m.

This year, Bob Bondurant, Bondurant School of High Performance Driving, Craig Jackson, Barrett-Jackson Auction Company, and Bryan Sperber, Phoenix International Raceway, will be honored as the 2009 Advocates of the Year.

Contact: Sherry Henry or Rebekah Bell at 602.452.2906 or visit www.aztourismalliance.org for more information.

“Mind-blowing” WrestleMania Coming to Glendale 2010

World Wrestling Entertainment's Vince McMahon promises that WrestleMania will level a "mind-blowing" show at University of Phoenix Stadium on March 28, 2010. McMahon, wrestlers, dignitaries and Arizona Cardinals head coach Ken Whisenhunt were in Glendale on Tuesday to announce that professional wrestling's biggest event would make its first stop in Arizona.

Wrestlers, and even Whisenhunt, compared the annual event to a Super Bowl. Like the NFL championship, WrestleMania should pack the football dome and overflow Glendale's entertainment district four days ahead of the show. WWE is negotiating with Westgate City Center, next to the stadium, to host WrestleMania's Rock the Block Party.

And like the NFL Experience, WrestleMania Axxess should set up near the stadium with four days of fan activities. WWE officials said other celebrations could be scattered around the Valley, such as a charity auction of wrestlers' art, a charity golf tournament and a WWE Hall of Fame induction.

"Wherever there is fun, that's where we'll be," said McMahon, the company's chairman. McMahon has grown the franchise and WrestleMania, which attracted more than 80,000 fans to Detroit in 2007 and nearly 75,000 to Orlando in 2008.

The Glendale stadium is expected to seat at least 65,000 for the event. "WrestleMania has become part of the cultural fabric," said wrestler Chris Jericho, soft-spoken and dressed in suit and tie in contrast to the colorful costumes and fists-in-the-air bravado associated with the WWE. The show will celebrate its 25th year on April 5 in Houston. Whisenhunt said that like the Super Bowl, fans book tickets well before they even know the matchups. "You know it's going to be good, just like the Super Bowl," he said. The support from the Cardinals, Glendale and state officials is a major reason the WWE opted to come to the Valley. John Sabor, vice president of special events, said the group looks to form partnerships that are good for the WWE while giving back to communities.

Glendale Mayor Elaine Scruggs said the \$35 million to \$50 million boost the event is expected to bring the Valley comes "at a time when we really do need this economic impact." (*By Carrie Watter, the Arizona Republic, February 25*)

Toolkit to Support Meetings, Events and Incentive Travel

The U.S. Travel Association says businesses receiving taxpayer assistance and others concerned about becoming the next "easy target" for the media and elected officials – including President Obama – are canceling meetings, events and performance incentive travel across the country. To help counteract the threat to the travel industry, U.S. Travel has launched a major, multi-faceted campaign "to resort common sense to the debate." The trade group has created a toolkit to help members formulate a response to what it regards as sustained, unfair attacks on meetings, events and incentive travel. The kit includes:

- [General Talking Points](#)
- [Economic Impact of Business Travel](#)
- [Local Impact of Cutting Business Travel](#)
- [Value of Meetings](#)
- [Convention Centers by State](#)
- [What Others Are Saying](#)
- [News Stories](#)
- [Sample Letter to Editor: Importance of MEI Travel](#)
- [Sample Letter to Editor: Industry Guidelines for Business Travel](#)
- [Sample Letter to Member of Congress](#)

U.S. Travel is urging members to write their Congressman and speak out locally on the issue. (*Travel Advance, Feb. 23*)

Tough Times Cut Into Vacation Plans

The sinking U.S. economy is forcing many Americans to cut back on or give up a hallowed tradition: the family vacation. A USA Today/Gallup Poll finds that 58 percent of people who normally take an annual vacation away from home will shrink their vacation spending this year--or just not go. The finding mirrors a 2009 travel forecast by consultants D.K. Shifflet & Associates and IHS Global Insight, which research travel behavior monthly. The firms forecast Americans will spend 9.7 percent less on leisure travel in April, May and June, and 9 percent less in July, August and September than in 2008. In sum, Americans could spend \$30 billion less on leisure trips this spring and summer.

The travel industry sees the storm coming and is hustling to respond. For April, spring break time, airlines have scheduled 8.5 percent fewer seats than last April on domestic and international flights from the U.S., according to OAG-Official Airline Guide. They've scheduled 8.4 percent fewer seats for June. (*Page 1A, USA Today*)

The stronger dollar and lower fuel prices should help limit the decline in U.S. travel to Europe, according to Donald N. Martin & Co., which compiles a monthly analysis of American travel to Europe. Overall trans-Atlantic traffic continued to drop in January, with leading carriers reporting an average decline of 4.2 percent compared to January 2008. Capacity was down an average 1.2 percent, putting the average load factor at 72.8 percent. U.S. travel to Europe was down 10.7 percent in November, according to the latest figures from the Department of Commerce. Worldwide, international travel will decline as much as 2 percent this year, the UN World Tourism Organization said. (www.TravelPulse.com, 2/20)

Consumer Gloom Climbs as Confidence Falls

Americans' already battered confidence in the economy went into free fall in February, sinking to new lows as consumers grow more fearful over massive job cuts and shrinking retirement accounts. The New York-based Conference Board said its Consumer Confidence Index, which was down slightly in January, plummeted more than 12 points in February to 25, from the revised 37.4 last month. That was well below the 35.5 level that economists surveyed by Thomson Reuters expected.

A year ago, the consumer confidence reading stood at 76.4. "Looking ahead, increasing concerns about business conditions, employment and earnings have further sapped confidence and driven expectations to their lowest level ever," said Lynn Franco of the Conference Board Consumer Research Center. (AP; www.ajc.com/Business)

Survey Shows Destination Picks of Affluent Travelers

Urban destinations continue to top the list of vacation destinations preferred by affluent travelers, with New York City and Las Vegas receiving top mentions, according to the just-released Ypartnership "Portrait of Affluent Travelers." Maui, San Francisco and Honolulu round out the top five spots in the national survey of 800 U.S. adults living in households with a minimum annual income in excess of \$150,000. According to the survey, three in 10 affluent leisure travelers are interested in visiting New York City and Las Vegas during the next two years. One in four is interested in visiting Maui, San Francisco and Honolulu, and approximately two in 10 are interested in traveling to Orlando or San Diego. Also on the list were Washington, D.C., Napa/Sonoma, Calif., and Hilton Head Island, S.C. Details at 407-838-1797. (*Special to TA*)

U.S. Travel and AMEX Launch TravelGreen.org Website

On February 12th, U.S. Travel and American Express, our Partners in Travel, launched TravelGreen.org, a new website promoting travel sustainability. This groundbreaking site serves as a resource for travel industry professionals, media and policymakers on key issues related to travel and the environment. The site features basic information about sustainability, government policies and activities, and also contains several dozen case studies submitted by travel destinations and suppliers. There are also links to websites where users can find even more in-depth information about how hotels, ski areas and others are working to "go green" with dynamic, voluntary programs that conserve energy, reduce waste and mitigate travel's impact on the environment.

Countdown on for New Border Regulations

In a little over 100 days, American citizens will have to present their passport in order to return to the U.S., and the U.S. Department of State encourages all citizens to obtain their passport prior to June 1, 2009. A passport, in either of its two presentations, will be a requirement to enter the U.S. by land or sea. A total of 16,208,003 passports were issued by the end of the fiscal year 2008, U.S. Department of State reported on their web page. Of those, 523,706 were in the form of U.S. passport cards. In Arizona, 349,932 passports were issued during that same period, which was a significant increase over the 212,872 issued in 2007.

With the enforcement of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative on January 23, 2007, anyone traveling by air outside of the United States was required to present a passport or other valid travel document to enter or re-enter the United States. The second phase of the initiative goes into effect on June 1 and it will impact anyone returning to the U.S. by land or sea.

The goal of the initiative was to reinforce safety procedures while promoting a reliable mode of identification that allowed for swift processing in ports of entry. The cost of the traditional passport is \$100 for those 16 and older and \$85 for minors under 16 years of age. The cost of renewal is \$75. The passport card costs \$45 for anyone 16 and older and \$35 for 16 and under. Those who have a traditional passport pay \$20 for a passport card. For those requesting both a passport and a passport card, the cost will be \$120 for those 16 or older and \$95 for people under 16 years of age. Both types of documents have expiration dates after 10 years for adults and 5 for minors. *(By Cesar Neyoy,BAJO EL SOL, February 16, 2009)*

Ernst & Young Identifies Key Trends to Shape the Industry in 2009

Global hotel markets are expected to continue to feel pressure from contracting economies and reduced leisure and business travel across much of the world in 2009. However, despite declines across most major regions of the world in 2008, operating performance in the global hotel industry remained profitable as hoteliers focused on controlling costs and preserving the bottom line, according to a report released by Ernst & Young LLP.

"There is little doubt that most markets in the current economic climate are challenging at best and growth will be hard to come by for most operators," said Michael Fishbin, National Director of Hospitality Services, Ernst & Young LLP. "As a result, this year we will see hotel operators continue to focus more of their energies on cost reduction, improving operating efficiencies in their hotels, reaching out to guests via enhanced Internet communication and strengthening their brands through an emphasis on green principles in activities related to both development and operations," he added.

The US 2009 lodging report carries an overview of global, including US, hotel sectors as well as in-depth analysis of the main lodging segments and market reports for 17 major US cities including New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Miami, Dallas and San Francisco. *(TravelMole Newsletter, February 26, 2009)*

U.S. Hotel Rates Fall as Occupancy Plummet

U. S. lodging industry occupancy and revenue per available room dropped by double-digit percentage levels in January compared with the previous year, according to data released by Smith Travel Research. Occupancy for the month fell to 45.9 percent, down 10.7 percent from the 51.5 percent occupancy levels seen in January 2008, the data indicated. RevPAR dropped 15.3 percent to \$48.24, and the average daily rate was down 5.2 percent to \$100.66. Among the top 25 markets, New York saw the biggest drop in average daily rate, down 13.1 percent. New York's RevPAR also was down by 27.1 percent, topped only by Detroit, which dropped by 28.6 percent. *(www,BTN.com, 2/25)*

Napolitano Backs New TSA Body Scanners

Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano endorsed the use of body scanners Wednesday to screen airline passengers despite concerns that the machines create vivid images of people under their clothing. Napolitano told the House Homeland Security Committee that body scanners are "actually less intrusive and easier" than being patted down by an airport screener. Last week, Tulsa International Airport became the first airport to use a body-scanning machine in place of a metal detector, which has been the main device to search airline passengers since screening began in 1973. The Transportation Security Administration plans to use the scanners in place of some metal detectors at five other airports, including San Francisco, Miami and Las Vegas. *(Page 4A, USA Today)*

When Service Means Survival

As the economy plunges deeper into recession, many companies are confronting brutal choices between cutting costs and cutting too deeply that it drives customers away, says Business Week in its cover story this week. Hertz, for example alienated some customers when it reduced its "instant return" hours at some smaller locations. It is now making adjustments to restore that service in locations where it "might have gone too far," said spokesman Richard Broome. From retailers who are stiffening the rules on returns to airlines that now charge for checked bags, companies are stretching budgets in ways that make things tougher for customers. But the best performers are actually doing more to safeguard service in this recession, says BW.

Top performers are treating their customers better than ever, even if that means doing less to wow new ones. Hoteliers are trying to trim in ways customers are unlikely to detect. In its third annual Customer Service Champs list, six travel suppliers were cited among the top 25: The Ritz-Carlton Co. (No. 4); Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts (12); Enterprise Rent-A-Car (16); American Express (17); and JW Marriott (25). (*Page 26, Business Week, 3/2*)

[Calendar of Events](#)

Visit www.ArizonaGuide.com to find information on all the exciting [events, festivals and activities](#) held throughout the Grand Canyon State!